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For Us, Women are Sacred: Gender and conflict in the Casamance

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*The paper examines the changes of gender relations and power inequalities in a context of nearly forty years intermittent war. It shows that gender roles have been both changing and consolidating during the conflict. Furthermore, analysis reveals a multipolar instead of a bipolar local conceptualisation of gender. Social youth differs from breadwinners on the male and mothers on the female side. The conflict has catalysed the development of new social positions for women (*cheffe de ménage*), new pathways to achieve social adulthood for men (*combattant*), reinforced customary gender relations (workload, role in the community), but it also thwarted gendered synergies in the traditional division of labour (breadwinner, childcare); being one of the contested ideological values, the conflict has finally – with certain exceptions – rather reinforced than weakened the protection of women against SGBV.*

Keywords: Casamance, conflict, gender, gender-based violence, Senegal, social change

Para nós, a mulher é sagrada: Género e conflito na Casamansa

*O artigo examina as mudanças nas relações de género e nas desigualdades de poder num contexto de quase quarenta anos de guerra intermitente, demonstrando como os papéis de género foram mudando e consolidando-se durante o conflito. Além disso, a análise revela uma conceptualização local multipolar – e não bipolar – de género. A juventude social difere do modelo de ganha-pão do lado masculino e do modelo da maternidade do lado feminino. O conflito catalisou o desenvolvimento de novas posições sociais para as mulheres (*cheffe de ménage*), de novos caminhos para atingir a idade adulta social para os homens (*combattant*), reforçou as relações costumeiras de género (carga de trabalho, papel na comunidade), mas também frustrou sinergias de género na divisão tradicional do trabalho (ganha-pão, cuidado com crianças); sendo um dos valores ideológicos contestados, o conflito, finalmente – com algumas exceções – reforçou mais do que enfraqueceu a proteção das mulheres contra a violência sexual e de género.*

Palavras-chave: Casamansa, conflito, género, violência baseada no género, Senegal, mudança social

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Gaston, who lives in the capital, Dakar, is a young, well-educated man from the Casamance[1], the conflict-stridden southern part of Senegal. One of the characteristics that stereotypically sets him apart from northerners is the fact that he, as supposedly Casamançais in general, would never insult his mother. "The northerners, they insult their mothers. Among us, women are sacred", is repeatedly mentioned as a marker of distinction. The argument is raised on both sides: Ousmane, a Senegalese soldier from the North who had been deployed to the Casamance, explained: "The local children [Sindian area] would come to the camp to play football... Even in the heat of the match – they did not curse. If it would be here you would hear them cursing all the time. There, they were all disciplined. They respected their parents". The second thing that stroke Ousmane most during his deployment was a kind of contradictory observation in regard to respect for women:

> They do not know how to treat a woman. The Balante women – I saw them getting up in the morning at 4 a.m., walking kilometres to get water, balancing the heavy buckets of 45 litres on their head all the way back, collecting the firewood, preparing the breakfast, waking up the children, preparing them for school, doing everything … and then the men get up, find their breakfast prepared. They [Balante men] do not do anything. (Interview, Thiès region, 2021)

A lot of research on the impact of conflict on gender looks foremost into SGBV or rape as a weapon of war (Buss, 2009; Meger, 2011; Sverdlov, 2017). Fewer studies deal with the indirect impacts of armed conflict on gender roles and relations (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012; Buvinic et al., 2009; Carpenter, 2006). Even less studies look into the long-term consequences of such shifts on, e.g., family structures or individual life cycles. Gaston, e.g., is unable to marry due to his precarious economic position in the internal diaspora (Rudolf, 2016). The reason why he cannot fulfil the necessary standards required by tradition to count as a responsible man is not related to his gender but to an intersecting level of discrimination. According to him, as an outsider in Dakar, he is discriminated both in regard to men and women:

> In the organisation I work now, the secretary and the accountant earn more than I do. The secretary earns 250,000 CFA sans bac, and the accountant 500,000 CFA avec

[1] Casamance, Casamance Region, nowadays often called Casamance naturelle is delineated by Gambia in the north, the Atlantic in the west, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry in the south, and the Gouloumbou River in the east. As an administrative unit it has been replaced by the regions of Kolda, Sedhiou and Ziguinchor, named after the capital of each region. Casamançais is the local term used for people living in/originating from the Casamance.

> *bac plus deux*. I know it. But they do not want to pay me what is appropriate. I have *bac plus cinq* and I only get 120,000 CFA. (Gaston, interview, 2012, Dakar)

His condition, being in a rather precarious social and economic situation as a person from a rural background in the national capital, is in a way typical for urban migrants in Africa or beyond. But his case differs in two regards: as a well-educated internal migrant in Dakar his case firstly exemplifies the typically unfulfilled expectancies toward the Senegalese state by the educated elite from the Casamance that experts identified as one of the main drivers of the conflict (Foucher, 2002). The fact that Gaston could not start a family and become a breadwinner in his home territory, secondly shows the repercussions of the conflict for his current social position and gender relations. What would look like a typical case in point for a general trend – namely changing work and gender relations in contemporary urban African cities – on a second look shows interdependent and intersecting factors that relate to specific political and socio-economic aspects of the conflict of his home region.

In the following, we scrutinise the role of conflict within the intersecting factors that define gender inequalities: Does it exacerbate gender-based discrimination, gender-related power asymmetries, and traditional gender roles – or is it a catalyst for change? This article, thus, proposes to use conflict situations that involve rapid social changes (Schlee, 2003) as a magnifying glass to identify concealed social structures and concepts related to gender. It wants to go beyond the eminent issue of directly war related sexual and gender-based violence to understand the wider implications of the nearly 40-years conflict on gender. Field research for this article was conducted in the years 2006-2013 and 2021, using a long-term approach and a mix of social anthropological methods (participant observation, in depth and biographical interviews, collection of oral history).[2]

Africa's longest lasting conflict

The Casamance, a small stretch of fertile land between Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry and the Senegalese province of Tambacounda, is usually portrayed as an economically promising part of a well-governed Senegalese democracy. The conflict – which started nearly 40 years ago in 1982 and is the by far longest running conflict on the African continent – has had a heavy death

[2] We would like to especially thank Demba Balde, Niels Harild, Emelie Smith, Paul Bance, and Stephen Miller from the World Bank for their generous and valuable support throughout the project. The cooperation with the World Bank and the University of Ziguinchor made it possible to extend previous work started in 2006 and amplify the included field sites with a research team headed by the author in 2012 and 2013.

toll and had caused regional political disruptions (Evans, 2004; IRIN News, 2012; Marut, 2010, p. 25). A supposedly "final" peace accord was signed between the separatist MFDC (*Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance*) and the Senegalese government in 2004. But tens of thousands of persons have continued to seek refuge from the remounting skirmishes (e.g. 2006, 2011) in neighbouring countries up to date (Có, 2015; Gueye, 2015).

In a region whose population is roughly 1,300,000, the year 2010 saw the peak of newly displaced persons with estimated 20.000 to 40.000. In 2013, adding residual IDPs, local NGOs assumed the total number to be close to 65,000. The number of new displacements had then declined sharply (Evans, 2021; IDMC, 2021; Ray, 2017) – until March when new skirmishes forced over 6000 refugees to flee to Gambia. Repercussions include around 850 victims of landmines – with the latest fatalities being counted in October 2021 (Agence France-Presse, 2021).[3] There are furthermore numerous heightened vulnerabilities – e.g. loss of livelihoods or lost access to land and precarious living conditions thereafter – associated with the conflict. Finally, the conflict has changed the role of women, both as actors – namely as mediators (Diallo, 2011; Diedhiou, 2016; Mané, 2012; Osemeka, 2011) – and as victims/survivors – namely as female headed households.

Low intensity and mediation resistant warfare

The Casamance has seen, historically, multiple attempts to enslave, colonise, convert and "civilise" its inhabitants – namely the campaigns of Islamization, French colonialism and Senegalese modernization.[4] According to popular accounts, the Casamance resisted, and was never fully assimilated into any of these respective projects (Roche, 1985). The prevalent political discourse refers to those features and stresses that the Casamance is ethnically, religiously, socially and economically distinct from the northern part of the country (Foucher & Awenengo, 2012). An independence movement that emerged in 1982 demanded sovereignty on the basis of this very discourse of historical and cultural differences.[5] Faced with brutal repression, the movement – centred mainly in what are today Ziguinchor Region and Sedhiou Region – soon took up arms and started a guerrilla war. During the course of the conflict, the sensitivity for attributed dif-

[3] Numbers from CNAMS; Landmine and cluster munition monitor (http://www.the-monitor.org/), 2018.

[4] Other processes of social change did occur from within. Many of them are still on-going and have altered the sociocultural landscape of the Casamance (Dramé, 2006; Nugent, 2008; Thomson, 2011).

[5] In fact, many other regions in Senegal seem to be less integrated and less developed than the Casamance and Casamançais (Foucher, 2002). The local narrative nevertheless points out that the Casamance has been the breadbasket of Senegal ever since – in other words the development is below its potential. For the question of how such stereotypes evolve, spread and persist, see Evans (2013) or Darbon and Faye (Darbon, 1988; Faye, 1994).

ferences rose and resulted in the discrimination of Casamançais, in particular the Diola ethnicity.[6]

Today the local situation is characterized by a split between the political and military wings of the MFDC and the repeated failure of cease-fires and peace talks. Nevertheless, the policy of discrimination and oppression applied by the military until a decade ago has been changed. Ex-President Abdoulaye Wade tried to pursue a political solution in the Casamance, but did not withdraw the military from the region. From 2009 onwards, matters deteriorated when a new, hardliner MFDC splinter group emerged. Additional heavy weapons entered the region, nightly street curfews were imposed, army posts were attacked, and some villages were bombed by the army ("Bombardement de Positions Rebelles", 2012; "Casamance: Trois Femmes Blessées", 2012). Parallel to the rise of violence, civil society's efforts to foster a sustainable mediation process multiplied. During the Senegalese presidential campaign of 2012, many different candidates were approached by women's organisations, who lobbied for the peace process ("Le Mémorandum qui Attend les Candidats", 2012).[7] With the political changes in Senegal (President Sall 2012 to present) and Gambia (President Barrow 2017 to present), the region entered another relatively calm phase.

Scholarly debate on the conflict has converged on the view that there is no one single cause that nourishes the conflict (Clark, 2011; Rudolf, 2013), but that there is, rather, a whole range of issues that lie behind it. These include: experiences of discrimination and human rights abuses; unsettled disputes linked to loss of property, sentiments of pride and revenge; income generated by violence and subsequent peace building; profits from illicit trading facilitated by insecurity; culture of fear linked to denunciations; unsettled claims for compensation or acknowledgment of suffering. These factors all serve to feed and uphold the conflict. In contrast to other less long-lasting conflicts, the potential of each grievance seems to be profound enough to reset the cycle of mutually reinforcing factors. In other words: One of the reasons why no mediation efforts so far succeeded and why the conflict is about to enter its fifth decade has been the failure to address all causes in a holistic way. Once one of the economic, political, historical, religious, ethnic, and socio-structural cleavages has been addressed, the others kicked in (Boiro, 2015; Evans, 2003; Foucher, 2005a; Lambert, 1998; Manga, 2012; Marut, 2005).

[6] This discrimination amalgamated units that had historically been rather unattached to each other. Historians have described the Diola as acephalous, living in decentralised settlements, and traditionally engaging in rice farming (Girard, 1969; Pélissier, 1958; Thomas, 1959).

[7] For a better idea on how politics and academia attribute a more and more prominent role to women's peace organisations in the Casamance, see Hellerström (2018), Johnson (2013), Osemeka (2011), or Salichs (2013).

Heterogeneous realities

Research for this article was mostly centred in the Basse Casamance, nowadays an equivalent to the Ziguinchor Region, where the ethnic group of the Diola, a group also found in the vicinities (cf. Baum, 1999; Mark, 1985), forms the majority, and the Balantakunda. Due to the regional concentration of violence in this area and because a high number of combatants are Diola, they are often associated with the MFDC. It should nevertheless be stressed that the MFDC is neither a solely Diola movement nor does it lead an ethnic war.[8] Furthermore, the Diola are not homogenous (Baum, 1999; de Jong, 1994; Joffroy, 1920; Klein, 1986; Linares, 1987; Mark, 1976; Nugent, 2008; Pélissier, 1958; Sapir, 1970; Snyder, 1977; Thomas, 1959). A peculiarity of the Ziguinchor Region is its ethnic diversity (22 out of Senegal's 38 languages are spoken there), and its heterogeneity.[9] In the Casamance intermarriage between ethnic groups is common, the population is quite mobile, and there are many shared markers of identity such as common initiation rituals.

To grasp this heterogeneity, this article examines cases from three different subregions of the *naturelle* Casamance region (dissolved in 1984) – Kasa, Fogny and Balantakunda, that are nowadays in the administrative regions of Ziguinchor and Sédhiou. Kasa is the territory south of the Casamance River around the village of Oussouye. It is regarded as a showcase for Diola tradition, though many non-Diola communities are found there. The Fogny region, around the city of Bignona, is home to another big Diola subgroup. Fogny-Diola is regarded the most commonly understood Diola dialect, and is one of Senegal's six recognised national languages. The third subregion chosen, the Balantakunda, southeast of Ziguinchor on the Southern River Bank, is probably the most ethnically diverse area out of the three.

The three researched regions and the lifeworld of their inhabitants are quite diverse: Kasa is famous for its *roi* (in fact, a king-priest with ritual powers), its wrestling competitions, and the *Econcon* dance (Baum, 1993; Faye, 1994; Moreau, 1994). The region has a strong Catholic influence. The coastal tourist resort of Cap Skirring provides some infrastructure. The Fogny is also predominantly Diola, but it features more Muslim and Mande influences. Many villages are considered *mandinguised* (Leary, 1971; Mark, 1978; Thomson, 2011). Political and religious

[8] For a number of reasons, Diola are often seen as the authors of the conflict: First, they are the majority in the *Département de Ziguinchor*. Second, they were the ones affected most by the initial government crackdowns. Third, they organized themselves into secret societies manifested physically in certain holy sites off-limits to outsiders, called "*bois sacrés*". Fourth, on a political level, the secession movement was denigrated by national politicians as an ethnic uprising.

[9] SIL, Ethnologue.com. Our research has sought to acknowledge the local diversity and to reflect this variety in the choice of different locations and researchers from different ethnic backgrounds.

chiefs play a more prominent role there. The Balantakunda region comprises Bainouk, Balante, Diola, Mande, Mankagne, Manjack, and Peul villages, which are often found next to each other. The socio-cultural structure varies accordingly from one village to the other, depending on the question of which group is dominant or which arrangement of cohabitation was established (Girard, 1969; Pélissier, 1966).[10]

In regard to climate, type of livelihoods, agricultural practices, and the specifications of gendered division of labour, there are also crucial differences: cattle driven ploughs are commonly found in the Fogny. Handheld *kanjandous* (local ploughs) are seen in the Kasa and the Balantakunda. But while the *kanjandou* is a tool virtually always used by men in the former, in the latter also women are seen using ploughs (for certain crops). In the Fogny, many villages thrive thanks to the trade in cannabis and tropical wood, which is mostly men's work. Kasa and Balantakunda regions are home to big cashew plantations and have very fertile land. Both of these latter regions have economic ties to Guinea-Bissau (Gueye, 2015; Linares, 1992, 2009, 2015; Pélissier, 1958).

Gender relations in the Casamance

Traditionally, the local division of labour throughout most of the Casamance assigns a major share of work to women. Across all ethnic groups, men, rather than women, are dominant in economic affairs. But the specific degrees and type of workload, involvement in decision-making, power and autonomy of women vary according to locality and ethnicity, and to some extent according to education, social and economic background. Even though ethnic and religious customs significantly condition gender relations, neither unequal gendered power relations nor gender-based violence can be unilaterally and universally correlated with either ethnicity or religion.

In other words, individuals and local authorities tend to differentiate rights and obligations within gender relation in regard to everyday matters – e.g., marital disputes or divorces – according to ethnic affiliation. But there are also intersecting factors that set certain cases apart from others within ethnic groups, e.g., economic status – and there are others that coincide, e.g., narratives of generalised male dominance. To assess individual cases in regard to vulnerabilities or assets, a reframed multi-layered approach to gender is necessary, as outlined in

[10] Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting (FGM/C) practices is one among various issues that exemplify these differences. The practice, drawn from Mandingo Islam, is prevalent amongst the northern ethnic groups in the Fogny/ Karon region. There is no FGM/C amongst the Diola Kasa, Bandial, and Ediamat groups from the Southern region. In the Balantakunda region, both traditions co-exist.

the concept of intersectionality: gender and gender roles are subject to and need to be assessed against the backdrop of other crosscutting power imbalances (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 2017).

Intersecting inequalities

Women trans-locally and trans-ethnically often expressed concerns that men did not live up to the expected roles, such as providing adequate nutrition, school fees, and representation of the family in public affairs:

> Our men do practically no work. They spend their time drinking palm wine in the public square. It is us [the women] who have to do everything to meet the needs of our families. If there is a meeting at the school, we are the ones going there. The men are not interested in the functioning of the family at all. After they have collected their palm wine, they do nothing else. And to avoid being asked by the children for whatever it might be, they return home late. Sometimes if the children ask them for something, they tell them to go and ask their mother. Therefore, we are obliged to find small works wherever – trying to satisfy our children's needs. (Anonymous, interview, 2012, Diogue)[11]

Even though the local division of labour often assigns a major role in work to women, men have traditionally been seen as the uncontested leaders of the household. This concept is not only found in rural areas: Although e.g. Gaston (cf. introduction) could theoretically marry a woman who has a higher salary than him, this would be inconsistent with the social norms that enjoin him to "be the man" in a relationship of that kind (Turshen & Twagiramariya, 1998). Gaston doubts whether he can be 'the man' while in a relationship in which his wife is the higher earner. In doing this, he points to the economic and power-related aspects of manhood and gender.

Women in the Casamance – as in many other African contexts – are foremost perceived (by themselves and others) as mothers, as life givers, as wives, as housewives, and as the primary caregivers of the children on a daily basis. The case of Diola women – once they are mothers and initiated (Linares, 1988) – illustrates how these two characteristics contradict each other, trapping women there and elsewhere in a contradictory position:

> Contemporary Jola society is marked by gender dissonance: Jola men are considered superior to women in legal and political domains, but as initiated mothers, women also have considerable power inside and outside the family realm. The ma-

[11] This comment compares the Diola men of Diogue with local Wolof and Ghana fishermen.

> ternal role is culturally emphasised and Jola women have a relatively high degree of personal, social and economic autonomy. (Dellenborg, 2009, p. 96)[12]

Many female respondents reported that they were left alone to pay for commodities, medical care and school fees for their children.[13] Therefore, many women have to take up extra income-generating activity alongside the domestic work for which they bear the full burden. The domestic work remains an additional responsibility to whatever other job or obligation women might have. Conflict induced impoverishment for women, thus, foremost means an exacerbation of their already harsh workload.

What of 'tradition', analytically understood here as a dynamic and ever-changing discourse? Locally the term is used to stress a fixed and unchanging specific value. Rules concerning marriage, weddings, bride price, and the rights and obligations in a marriage are certainly strongly influenced and delineated by religion. In the Kasa region, Islam has not gained the same influence as in other parts of the Casamance, and there is a large population of animists.[14] Certain animist groups indeed feature strict traditional taboos concerning females, such as not beating an adult woman. Yet according to our research, women in groups that follow traditional religion are exposed to domestic violence or abuse too.

On the one hand, tradition, customary law, and sociocultural structures stratify gender relations but are a relatively flexible framework on the other hand. Individual attitudes, distinctive social norms, and a lack of financial autonomy for women go hand in hand with the risk of being subjected to gender-based violence. But – revolving around a taboo (cf. below) – statistics that show that the more educated a woman is, the better she is paid, the fewer children she has, the better her material conditions, the less she is likely to experience domestic violence nevertheless have to be taken with a grain of salt (ANSD, 2012, p. 286).

Rights and obligations

Regardless their heterogeneity, Diola women generally seem to enjoy more rights than women of other ethnicities, have more influence over economic resources and claim that they are protected by tradition and social network against certain forms of gender-based violence, especially against intimate partner vi-

[12] Dellenborg specifies this: "as initiated mothers, women have relatively strong influence in society in general, their natal villages in particular. Typically, women have more authority in their role as sister and mother than in their role as wife (cf. Sacks, 1979). Furthermore, women are supposed to be docile and patient, while on the other hand, as mothers they are seen to be strong and powerful (cf. Rosander, 1998)" (Dellenborg, 2009, p. 96).

[13] Polygamy exists in various forms in Senegal – alongside monogamy: approximately 50 percent of marriages in Senegal were polygynous in 2009 (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

[14] The term animist is used by the interlocutors and is used here without any judgement or evaluation.

olence. Virtually everybody – experts and local interviewees alike – confirm a strong social position for Diola women: "Jola women are popularly viewed as enjoying considerable power and autonomy from men" (Lambert, 2008, p. 86). This female power, however, has its limits and needs to be put in relation: "while women might have been able to crack male domination, they are still far being completely undoing it" (Lambert, 1999, p. 90).[15] The limited (due to persistent male domination) autonomy and power Diola women enjoy, furthermore, differs strongly from one area to the other.

In Bandial, the autonomy of female labour is institutionalised (anonymous interviews, June 2012). Both men and women have their own fields to cultivate. The women manage the rice stock; men are prohibited, by religious rules, from entering the stores. Traditionally the women given to another family is not given away because the family cannot nourish her, but to strengthen an alliance with another concession.

> The women marry outside their lineage, their concession. They stay attached to their original lineage during their marriage and her original family still feels responsible for her. Her children belong to the other concession, but it is them that ensure peace and social cohesion with her mother's original family. (Tendeng-Weidler, interview, June 2012)

When women marry, they are not "bought", even though there might be a bride-price to pay for the family: it is supposedly a wedding gift for the community and the parents of the bride.[16] This means the wife does not become the property of her husband after marriage. She is still attached to the original family and will go back to her parent's concession if divorced. This might happen because the wife is sent back home, because she decides to go, or because her family officially comes and takes her back (a custom not unique in Senegal, cf. Kouassigan, 1936).

Gender-based power relations make visible the (indirect) correlation between ethnicity and unequal gendered power relations. Among the Mande and Peul (and the Balante that adopted a Mande lifestyle) women do the largest part of the work while men (according to both male and female interviewees) lament about the quality – hardship, responsibility – of the work. The Bignona area shows that, in addition to ethnicity, gender relations are also influenced by religion, as this

[15] This domination can be traced back to the control of resources, like wages for seasonal work. Lambert shows how around the turn of the 19th century women's earnings went directly into the pocket of their male counterparts (Lambert 1999, p. 90). This has changed, but the domination is still not undone.

[16] The difference between buying a woman and giving a gift to her family is relevant in the case of a divorce where the gift cannot be returned to the husband (while in other ethnic groups the bride-price has to be reimbursed).

area has been influenced by Muslim-Manding traditions and also features similar characteristics.

The Banyoun, on the contrary, have remained less influenced by outside traditions and showcase large differences in regard to the position of woman, which is exceptionally strong. They have the right to own land and basically remain part of their family of origin rather than being given to the in-laws. According to our research, the women in the Balantakunda region have been reported unanimously to be exposed to a stricter form of patriarchy than the Banyoun and most Diola women: the only sources of income women declared in that region were the vegetable gardens (often managed collectively) or other small businesses such as selling juice (anonymous interviews, Balantakunda, 2008 and 2012). In sum, it is clear that ethnic, regional, and religious customs firstly vary significantly, and secondly, condition gender relations to a large extent. But neither unequal gendered power relations nor gender-based violence can be unilaterally and universally correlated to ethnicity or religion due to the heterogeneous realities in each village.

Forms and impacts of violence

Each region has had different experiences of the conflict. In the Kasa and in the Balantakunda, the rich soil and the good price of cashew nuts provide a rather steady income to the MFDC and criminal armed gangs.[17] The local population – especially in the Balantakunda – have often been driven off their land and cannot return.[18] The Balantakunda is affected heavily by mines, displaced villages, raids, and cattle-theft. In the Fogny, south of the Gambian border, a MFDC faction established some kind of liberated zones, off-limit to the army (in exchange for an implicit ceasefire, in a deal with the state), which have persisted for decades now. In the whole Fogny region traditional farming has become more difficult due to the amount of cattle theft and the extent to which fields are inaccessible. A substantial part of livelihoods in this region is made up of smuggling and small cannabis plantations today.

As MFDC camps are often located close to the border, those regions have been more affected than others. Many villages close to the border to Gambia or Guinea-Bissau were completely abandoned. Families usually have ties over the border to Guinea-Bissau (Có, 2015). Those ties facilitate refugees to find a point

[17] This article proposes to establish a terminology that analytically differentiates the army, the MFDC, and the criminal armed gangs according to their actions, and not the individuals that are engaging in those actions – and who might actually be active in different functions in parallel.

[18] Both the MFDC and criminal armed gangs depend on the revenues made in such occupied plantations.

of entry in the neighbouring country. Given the protracted nature of the conflict most of the civilians enduring in these areas have established working relations with the violent factions in the meantime. Throughout the Casamance, there has been a varying intensity of combat between the army and the various MFDC groups respectively inter-MFDC skirmishes.[19] The different regions have, thus, experienced various levels of exposure to abductions, abuse, raids, mines, lethal violence, and so on. The diverse communities furthermore do not always get along well, as suspicion among them has risen due to the conflict.[20]

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an appalling symptom of unequal power relations between men and women.[21] But usually, it is difficult to get information on GBV and especially on sexual violence (SV). It is equally challenging to integrate local notions of violence (see deprivation of food below) into the analysis. In our research, all people interviewed agreed that it is generally taboo to speak about sexual violence against women and that it is, consequently, not a subject of everyday conversations. Sexual violence against men was never mentioned or alluded to. Speaking about sex and sex-related issues within the family – especially between parents and children – is virtually impossible. This taboo is a question of good manners, but it is also connected to and based on a variety of religious rules concerning genitals, menstruation, birth, etc. Information is thus contradictory: while some people described gender-based violence as very common, widespread, and on the rise, others believed it does not exist at all. While some claimed that the Casamance is a region with a lower incidence of gender-based violence than the rest of Senegal, others seemed to be convinced of the opposite.

The amount of reliable numbers on gender-based violence, or statistics or records that would allow an authoritative judgment on the matter is limited. Victims of gender-based violence in the Casamance are almost all women. But rape is not systematically used as a weapon of war and women have not yet taken up weapons on any side in the Casamance conflict. A group of women on the contrary affirmed in an interview that domestic violence had in fact de-

[19] The faction of Salif Sadio is based north of Sindian, Fogny. The base of Cesar Atoute's group in the Kasa is south of Siganar. A group that emerged around 2010 has been headed by Niantang Diatta has its bases in the Goudomp area. These three groups currently constitute the major MFDC divisions. But there are further subdivisions and shifting alliances that make the picture more complicated (Evans, 2021; Foucher, 2019; Rudolf et al., 2016, 2017). The experiences of the population differ according to which faction is based in their vicinity.

[20] The conflict has both created and sharpened division in the whole region along lines of ethnicity: (Diola vs. Balante vs. Mande vs. Peul, etc.), nationality (Guinea-Bissau vs. Senegal), and autochthony (descendants of first settlers vs. latecomers).

[21] In the Casamance the only known cases of gender-based violence against men have been linked to torture in police or military custody (Amnesty International, 1998). Those reports are about torture involving the genitals of men, but there are no cases of male rape.

creased due to the ongoing conflict. They explained that a while ago a husband was beating his wife badly. She cried so loud that it was heard in the *maquis* [MFDC camp]. The *maquisards* came, told the man: "Stop beating our sister!" – and then hit him badly. After that event, the men in the village reportedly did not dare to argue with their wives anymore (group discussion, Balantakunda, 2012). The reaction of the *maquisards* needs to be seen in the context of abovementioned statement about women being sacred in the Casamance.

Yet even if customary rights place women in a special position, actual practice may differ. Many respondents explained that the divorcing wife´s family would ask the woman seeking to leave her husband: "Are you given enough food?"/ "Did your husband feed you well?"/ "Have you eaten every day?" – If the answer is positive, the family usually would send the wife back asking her "So – what do you want? Go back to your husband" (various interviews in the Casamance, 2007-2012). In other words, economic conditions and customary social norms transcend the religious and ethnic foundations of gender relations. Both, ultimately, lay the ground for gender-based violence: Numerous interviewed Casamançais, referring to traditions and everyday needs, held domestic violence, abuse, or marital rape as no legitimate reasons for divorcing or abandoning your spouse.[22]

Norms vs. practice

Assaults are punishable by one to five years in prison and a fine in Senegal, both of which are increased if the victim is a woman.

Domestic violence causing lasting injuries is punishable with a prison sentence of 10 to 20 years; if an act of domestic violence causes death, the law prescribes life imprisonment.[23] Interviews and observations showed that the local understanding of what constitutes gender-based violence does not coincide with definitions found in national and international conventions. The legal definition of sexual violence is not echoed locally: In numerous conversations, male respondents listed different types of physical violation just to explain that none of them is connected to the conflict, and had not happened in their neighbourhoods (anonymous men, interviews, 2007-2012).

[22] There are many social institutions in Diola villages that protect women from such abuses (anonymous interviews, 2007-2012). Other ethnicities make fun of the exceptional standing of the Diola women (relative to other local ethnicities) – thereby affirming that standing as a fact – by saying that the Diola men are afraid of their wives (observations in Senegal, 2007-2008).

[23] The U.S. Department of State summarizes the situation in Senegal as following: "Violence against women is against the law, but the law was not enforced. … There were no statistics available on the number of abusers prosecuted under the law. Close, older family members often committed rape and paedophilia within the household, making it difficult for victims to file lawsuits" (Department of State. The Office of Electronic Information, 2011).

In contrast to declarations asserting that sexual violence is absent in the community, an older man explained that a wife has to compensate her husband for not satisfying his sexual demands once by having intercourse with him day by day during the following week – otherwise she would be excluded from social life (anonymous man, interview, June 2012). Such statements point to the existence of gender-based violence perceived that is not directly related to the conflict as well as to institutionalized marital rape.[24] The local perception of what constitutes GBV is evidently not congruent with afore mentioned national and international (legal) conventions. During various observations and numerous interviews, it became clear that being slapped was mostly not considered violence, neither for children nor for women. Being deprived of food was considered to be a serious form of violence (see above); being denied commodities like soap, nice clothes or jewellery was often mentioned by women as examples of violence. In other words: economic deprivation is more widely recognized as a form of violence than physical or sexual violence. This is more of a public opinion than an individual perception – in other words, it is relative to the different individual contexts of domestic violence.

Understandings of what constitutes domestic violence were found to vary significantly within the Casamance region. In order to assess the prevalence of domestic violence, a survey inquired the acceptability of physical violence in cases of burning a meal, engaging in an argument with the husband, going out without telling him, neglect of children and refusal of sexual relations with the husband. According to the responses, more women (60%) than men (24%) found domestic violence justified in at least one of the above-mentioned cases (ANSD, 2012, p. 284). Research also indicated that men are regarded to be superior to women, regardless of the ethnicity of the respondent. It became also clear during research that there is a tight social structure reinforcing patriarchy:

> The cases of violence between men and women are very common in our Balante milieu. The women are considered objects; they are often victims of a life of torture. Among other things I can testify that in my own family my mother was beaten because she felt tired after a hard day's work and dared to say no to my father in their intimacy. (Man from Diattakunda, anonymous, interview, 2012)

[24] GBV is rarely prosecuted: "Prosecutions for rape remained minimal since judges seldom had sufficient proof that rape occurred, especially when rape happened within a family. It was common to settle rape cases out of court to avoid the publicity and costs associated with prosecution. Ministry of Justice statistics estimated that 47 percent of accused rapists go unpunished and released without going to trial" (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

Changed and consolidated structures

To understand the impact of the conflict on gender relations in the Casamance, there are numerous first and second-round impacts of the conflict on all levels of the society that have to be taken into account. Individuals and families suffer direct economic losses, do not have access to their fields, and often live in cramped rooms under precarious conditions. The economic consequences of the conflict (analysed below) have dramatic effects on the relations between men and women. Several respondents noted a rise in domestic violence and linked it to the economic conditions of the affected household. For example, sometimes thirteen people live in two rooms of ten square metres each, a situation that provides no opportunity for intimacy.

Interviewed experts attributed a number of violations to the living conditions of internally displaced persons (IDPs). According to them, men may turn violent because they cannot live up to their expectations and provide for their families after losing their livelihoods due to the conflict. Families that become impoverished due to the conflict cannot afford to pay for their children's education or feed them. They are consequently given away. While this is true for both girls and boys, girls are more vulnerable in this regard. Forced marriages are a way to give away girls at an early age in order to have one less mouth to feed. It is also evident that the education of young women suffers due to the conflict (anonymous interviews, 2007-2012).

Female headed households

The conflict affects the population directly and indirectly. Those who were affected directly are, *inter alia*, people killed or wounded during attacks or mine incidents, rape survivors, and victims of robbery; those who are affected indirectly are refugees and IDPs, but also widows, orphans, and the victims' families in general.[25] Many women from the latter group face a special situation: they become the leaders of the household. The case of Laura,[26] a woman from Toubakouta, exemplifies the extent to which this status brings along new vulnerabilities, increased social obligations, but also more powers:

Laura, a woman in her thirties, now lives in Ziguinchor with five teenagers dependent on her. She comes from Toubakouta, a village between the regional capital Ziguinchor and the border to Guinea-Bissau. It is located in the vicinity of a base of the MFDC. At the peak of violence in the nineties, the village was aban-

[25] The term "victim" is used here to distinguish a perpetrator from the individual targeted. It does not imply that the affected person is or has been without agency, strength, or determination.

[26] Name changed by the author. Various in-depth interviews with Laura were conducted between 2007 and 2013.

doned. In 2006, after inter-MFDC clashes in the area ceased, part of the population returned to the village, where they struggled to rebuild houses and recover their farmland. Other villagers were afraid to return due to security concerns. Since 2009, the village has been a persistently troubled part of the Casamance. In 2012, during the harvest, armed groups prevented the villagers from accessing their fields, and the farmers lost their entire harvest to those groups.

When the conflict started in the eighties, the MFDC began to intimidate the villagers of Toubakouta. They collected money and recruited youngsters. At this moment, Laura's father decided that they should abandon their house, but he died before. Thereafter, Laura's family was shattered and spread over Guinea-Bissau and the Lower Casamance. She herself was given to an aunt who promised to educate her, but who never lived up to that promise. While her cousins went to school, Laura had to work as a housemaid. She managed to find a *patron*, a woman that enabled her to get a professional qualification, and who brought her to Dakar where she established a livelihood as a market woman selling Casamançais products. Then, her mother and her brother became sick. She returned, took care of her brother and of her mother, who died shortly afterwards. Before her brother died in 2010, she took care of him, his two children, and two other children of her other brothers. The only occupation she found in Ziguinchor was to sell cooled water and fruit juices in the streets. But, due to the protracted nature of conflict and displacement, in the end, "everybody is selling in town. It is not like before, when you could make a living selling something. Nowadays, we all sell. I ask myself: If we all sell – who is supposed to buy?" Laura explains.

Laura calls the four teenagers "my children" and puts all her energy into making sure that they "can go to school and get an education, like I always would have wished to." High schools and workshops to acquire professional skills are virtually only found in Ziguinchor, where life is expensive:

> We are obliged to return [to Toubakouta], life is too expensive in Ziguinchor. But how would I manage to cope, a single mother without a man? And you always stay with your doubts – will they attack my house again? People say the war is over on the radio. But do they know what is in the heads of the people that stay in the bush? (Laura, interview, 2010, Ziguinchor)

Women are generally affected more by the repercussions of the conflict on the market: When people are afraid to move because of the conflict, women are especially hit by the decrease in trans-border trade (anonymous interviews, June 2012). When access to markets is blocked, women lose their only cash income.

Laura's case is typical of the stronger social obligations of women to remain close to their families and of the absence of men due to their being more likely to be recruited, killed or displaced.

Gendered vulnerabilities

The case also exemplifies the difficulties caused by the protracted nature of the Casamance conflict. Laura – like many others – has been deprived of access to the flow of resources offered by the village, such as nutrition and housing. In the village, the costs of childcare and education are lower, and the elderly and unemployed family members can be accommodated more easily. Throughout Africa, the village is often the last resort for those who can only partially afford city life and have trouble to maintain a family in town. The war reversed this trend: urban families now must house their impoverished displaced relatives from the rural areas: We "cannot refuse them, which aggravates the situation for all" (Anonymous, interview, June 2012).

> We suffered a lot during the crisis. Men suffered, but not like us, the women. Some people are traumatised and some even died. We had to leave the village and all goods behind. The men have tried to rebuild a livelihood, but they did not succeed. Therefore, we suffered in Ziguinchor – it was terrible. Sometimes 10 people slept in the same room. […] We could not get enough food. (Anonymous, interview, 2009, Toubakouta)

This quote shows the equally devastating situation of the men that face different, but not necessarily less risks and vulnerabilities. The role as the head of the family traditionally attributed to men is linked to the command of economic resources. Men are, thus, blamed for any economic deprivation of family members. Such deprivation is regarded as a lack of responsibility at best and violent mistreatment at worst. Such cases of men being blocked – as Gaston's example (cf. introduction) showed – occur throughout Senegal, yet Casamançais are especially affected: The conflict diminishes men's chances of establishing themselves as the head of a family. The effects of the conflict distress men directly where livelihoods disappear, access to land is blocked, and the low-cost social insurance offered by village life is lost. Men are affected indirectly when income opportunities for family members diminish or when relatives are otherwise affected by the conflict, because it remains a responsibility of the head of the household to ensure a decent living for them.

Without any possibility of maintaining a family, men lose their social status as adult men. Soldiers and combatants, in contrast, are able to re-establish their

masculinity through the benefits gained by joining armed groups. They are able to take a wife at an early age and can access the resources needed to maintain a family. Foucher (2005b, p. 445), for example, points out that combatants do have more access to women than before because they have gained access to money and arms. Our observations confirmed this: most MFDC combatants had a family and were able to support it. Most young men involved with the MFDC in the rural hinterland of Ziguinchor could afford a motorbike, a laptop, or other gadgets. Young men are still easily recruited for illegal activities: those who could deliver the wood needed to build a matrimonial bed to the carpenter – a minimum requirement to marry – were also the men that were involved in the local (illegal) lumber trade.[27]

Those men who do not want to get involved in the conflict often flee their villages.[28] Many are nevertheless forced to travel back and forth to farm the fields, work on the plantations and go hunting. They are therefore often victims of abuses or mine incidents.[29] Risks are gendered, but they need to be assessed holistically – just as the families assess them holistically as well: Women of certain rural communities close to the combatant's bases explained that it is too dangerous for their men to be around, because they would be beaten up or even killed. Women, on the other hand, would be able to escape such fates by appealing to the combatants and stressing their status as mothers. Therefore, they are the only ones going into the bush (Anonymous interviews, 2009, Toubakouta). When a village comes under threat from either side and its population decides to leave, it is often the women who are left behind alone in the village, because people feel that they run a lower risk of being attacked (Anonymous interviews, June 2012).[30]

Conclusion

Even though it is difficult to differentiate between conflict and non-conflict related shifts in gender roles, the conflict certainly has changed the roles of the men and women. Respondents perceived the traditional balance as shaken: According to our interviewees, women are said to have more responsibilities and to have better diversified their activities. This, in turn, has challenged the role tradition-

[27] Observations and interviews, Diouloulou area, 2007-2009.

[28] Among the Diola, at least, there was massive outmigration of young adults long before the conflict (Foucher, 2002). The conflict only accelerated that trend.

[29] Investigations in Boutoupa-Camarakounda, 2007-2008. There is a proportion of men (and women) in every village leaving rural life behind to search for a better life abroad. But the conflict adds to this.

[30] The decisions over who takes the risks and which tactics are applied to counter the prevalent insecurity largely depend on the circumstances. In some cases, women became the victims of banditry or landmine victims while collecting fruit or wood in the bush (Anonymous interviews, 2012; Bafata, Toubakouta, 2009).

ally attributed to men, which allegedly led to more tensions and divorces than before the conflict. Besides this observation, above-mentioned cases also show that three other trends have proliferated: women becoming *cheffe de ménage*, men being degraded to social youth, or trying to rebuild their masculinity by joining armed groups.

When men cannot provide for the family anymore, or when they flee or get killed, women have increasingly been obliged to take on the work traditionally reserved for men, in addition to their traditional obligations like childcare, household and daily labour. Taking this role is especially difficult under the current economic difficulties related to the conflict (e.g., access to the fields, transport of products, etc.). But it is also particularly problematic in circumstances where customary law frequently does not provide equal rights in regard to access or ownership of land for women. While many women cope despite these challenges, some others are impoverished and have to depend on aid from external sources. The changing capacities of men to act as breadwinners have empowered and/or impoverished women while relegating male adults to the status of social youth. This, in turn, has posed a serious challenge to the customary role of men and thus the traditional fabric of families.

In comparison to other wars, rape and sexual and gender-based violence have not been observed as a systematic strategy. On the contrary, in accordance with the division between female social youth and mothers, the results show a strengthened position of mothers in regard to sexual, gender-based, or domestic violence. Yet there is a heightened risk for all females due to indirect impacts of the conflict, namely for IDPs in physically cramped, economic precarious and psychologically traumatising circumstances and in temporarily ungoverned spaces open for criminal activities.

In regard to SGBV, it is worthwhile to return to the seemingly trivial difference between Northerners and Casamançais about insulting mothers. Statements like the following, from an unmarried woman in Dakar, show the relevance of the issue in the local context: "The worst are the insults: when they insult me and my mother. I prefer to be beaten than to get insulted" (Anonymous interview, Dakar, 2021). It is a striking feature of the Casamance conflict that female combatants, child soldiers, or systematic mutilations, respectively sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) – all infamous characteristics of wars in otherwise in multiple ways similar societies, such as in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Coulter, 2009; Ellis, 1999; Hoffman, 2011) – are virtually absent.

This might be related to an issue that some respondents remembered as a trigger for the war back in 1982: "When the conflict started, there was a demonstra-

tion and women went ahead carrying water, symbolising peace – the police used violence nevertheless. They did beat them. They did not respect our traditions. People fled and gathered in the *bois sacré* to organise themselves. That was the start of the conflict" (Anonymous interview, Ziguinchor, 2007). The role of mothers (Linares, 1988) and their being sacred has been a central element of the MFDC ideology (Rudolf, 2013).[31] The Casamance conflict might, thus, be one of the rare cases where the protection of women has heightened – at least theoretically and bearing in mind the mentioned indirect negative impacts on domestic and criminal violence – during an armed conflict. Besides reinforcing traditional gender roles, the conflict has also led to changes in gender relations, such as the position of the breadwinner; it has, thus, both aggravated and altered gender inequalities.

Our results finally suggest that analysis of gender, including violence against women, must account for variations across ethnic groups and within regions, as well as for the specific social and economic position of each case. The conceptualization of gender in the Casamance has been shown to be rather multidimensional. Our research illustrated the differences between young men and women and those considered social adults. The situation of a woman acting as a father and mother differs so much from that of an unmarried young woman that the idea of categorising both individuals in the same group undermines any meaningful analysis. If used as a starting point to dissect power relations and discriminatory practises in general, an intersectional gender analysis can, on the contrary, be extremely useful in differentiating discrimination, inequalities, and power relations. The results show, last but not least, that the wider political and ideological framework (such as an ideology that protects women) might have as much of an impact on gender-based violence as material conditions.

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[31] Women are on another level, also indispensable for purification rituals (Diedhiou, 2016; Thomas, 1959).

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